DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 378 026 RC 019 942

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TITLE An Evaluation of West Yorkshire Sports Counselling Project: Workshop Report.
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 7p.; In: Adventure-Based Interventions with Young People in Trouble and at Risk. Proceedings of a National One-Day Conference "Adventure-Based Interventions" (April 22, 1994) and a Study Weekend "Enabling Troubled Youth" (Ambleside, England, United Kingdom, April 22-24, 1994); see RC 019 931.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Agency Cooperation; *Athletics; Foreign Countries; Individual Development; *Leisure Education; *Program Evaluation; *Rehabilitation Counseling; Rehabilitation Programs; Research Design
IDENTIFIERS England (Yorkshire); *Probation (Criminal Justice)

ABSTRACT

The West Yorkshire (England) Sports Counselling Association (WYSC) is a voluntary organization that, in partnership with the Probation Service, provides sports counseling to persons on probation or youth justice supervision. Sports leaders provide sports counseling on a one-on-one basis during a 12-week program of activities designed for the individual participant. The program aims to introduce each participant to a structured program of sports and leisure activities that provide positive experiences and achievements, and to work with participants to the point that they can pursue such activities independently. In its first year, WYSC worked with approximately 70 clients, of whom 39 completed the program. WYSC identified reasons why monitoring and evaluation of the program were necessary, and hired evaluators from the University of Sheffield to handle external evaluation. Six research objectives were agreed upon: (1) program impact on client reconviction rate; (2) why participation had this impact, if it did, and other factors influencing impact; (3) good practice in working with local authorities; (4) good practice in working with the Probation Service; (5) equality of access to WYSC; and (6) reactions of participants. Research design and methodology are outlined for each of these objectives. (SV)

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# AN EVALUATION OF WEST YORKSHIRE SPORTS COUNSELLING PROJECT: WORKSHOP REPORT

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# An Evaluation of West Yorkshire Sports Counselling Project:

# Workshop Report

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## Introduction

This paper describes the evaluation of West Yorkshire Sports Counselling by the Leisure Management Unit of the University of Sheffield. A brief description of WYSC will be followed by an overview of the evaluation process. I shall go into some parts of this in greater detail to illustrate specific points. The evaluation will only be complete in April 1996 so this paper only discusses methods and not results.

## West Yorkshire Sports Counselling

The WYSC Association is a voluntary organisation formed in June 1991, and registered as a charity in May 1993. Its purpose is to provide a Sports Counselling project to work with Probation Service Clients. It has drawn on the experience of the Solent Sports Counselling Project, which was monitored as a Sports Council demonstration project over the period 1986-1990 (1) (2).

Start-up funding was provided by the Intermediate Treatment Fund and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. In November 1992 an application for grant aid from the Home Office was approved, which was consistent with Home Office policy encouraging partnerships between the Probation Service and other organisations. The most likely source of long term funding, beyond 1996, is a proportion of the probation service budget planned to be allocated to independent sector supervision projects.

In early 1993 four sports leaders were appointed on a part-time basis. Unlike in the Sport Solent Scheme they are linked to the Sports Development Units in the four local authorities: Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield. A fifth sports leader is due to be appointed in Leeds in the summer of 1994.

Sports Counselling can form a part of the supervision programme of an offender on Probation or Youth justice Supervision, but it is not a condition of any sentence. The client and probation officer together decide that the client will become involved in Sports Counselling.

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After an initial meeting of the client and probation officers with the sports leader, a 12-week programme of activities is followed. The programme is on a one-to-one basis, although additional group sessions have been introduced.

The programme will be unique to each client but has specific objectives. These are:-

1. To employ sports counselling on an individual basis with participating clients, especially at the initial contact stage.

2. To motivate the participant's interest in sport and leisure activities towards positive experiences and achievements.

3. To introduce each participant to a structured programme of sport and leisure activities.

4. To develop awareness of and support for Sports Counselling with Offenders amongst relevant organisations and agencies providing sports and leisure opportunities.

5. To show each participant how to make use of local sport and leisure facilities and services.

6. To work, whenever possible, with the participant to the point at which s/he has the confidence and motivation to independently pursue sporting and leisure activities.

A lesson learnt from the Sports Solent project, and through this work, is that early on in the counselling process exit routes need to be identified. At the outset it is clear to the client that the programme is 12 weeks long and the sports leader has to be aiming towards the client's autonomous participation in sport at the end of this period. In the first year of operation WYSC has worked with approximately 70 clients and 39 of these have completed the programme. Even with limited publicity the number of clients that probation officers would like to refer to the programme far exceeds the number that the sports leaders can work with.

## Planning for evaluation

WYSC Association had clearly identified why monitoring and evaluation was required. These were stated in a planning document as:-

- To know if the project was achieving its mission statement of using sports counselling effectively in reducing offending behaviour in West Yorkshire.
- To provide reports to funding partners.
- To provide reports to the local authority partners.
- To provide reports to the West Yorkshire Probation Service.
- To provide reports to the general public and the media.
- To act as a model of good practice.
- To assess the reaction of offenders and their acceptance of this type of work.

This monitoring and evaluation was split into that which would be done internally and externally. A budget was allocated for this and a project evaluation brief advertised. Eight research organisations put in tenders. These were evaluated and the Leisure Management Unit at the University of Sheffield was chosen to do the job.

Several aspects of this process are worth noting at this stage. Firstly, WYSC Association had already established its own aims and objectives for the project. It had also established why it required monitoring and evaluation. This allowed it to produce a clear research brief which made it easier for us to prepare a bid to do the job and for WYSC Association to choose between tenders. Thus even before research is started, the planning process that had led up to it makes it more likely that it will be conducted effectively. Both WYSC Association and the Leisure Management Unit are clear about what needs to be done and why.

## The research

The research brief had set out proposed methods. These were responded to in our tender for the work and the methods eventually chosen were agreed in the early stages of the research. Table 1 lists the objectives of the research and the methods that will be used to achieve those objectives.

**Table 1. Research objectives and methods**

| | Research Objectives | Methods |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | The impact of the scheme on client's propensity to re-offend | 2-year comparative reconviction study of clients and control group |
| 2 | Why participation in the scheme has this impact, if it does. Other factors that influence the effect of the scheme. | Changes in self-esteem as measured by test instrument.<br><br>Interviews with Sports Leaders. Interviews with Probation Officers. Client's Questionnaire. Case Studies that combine client's questionnaire, Sport Leader interviews and Sports Leader's records of work with clients. Reasons for early termination of participation from Sports Leader's records and interviews. Interviews with Sports clubs/ leisure facility managers. |
| 3 | Good practice in working with local authorities. | Interviews with local authority Sports Development Officers. Interviews with Sports Leaders. |
| 4 | Good practice in working with the Probation Service. | Interviews with Sports Leaders and Probation Officers. |
| 5 | Equality of access to WYSC. | Comparison of clients to those entering probation who would be eligible for WYSC by sex, ethnic group. Interviews with Probation Officers. |
| 6 | The reaction of offenders to WYSC. | Questionnaire to clients. Interview<br>Interview with Sports Leaders and Probationers. |

This illustrates the range of methods that we are using, the different sorts of research objectives and the ways in which methods can converge to meet them.

## Objectives

### Objective 1

The first objective is to examine the impact of the scheme on clients' propensity to re-offend. This matches the mission statement of WYSC Association and is concerned with proving to other organisations, especially funders and partners, that WYSC Association is doing what it set out to. To do this it is important that even before the research was commissioned WYSC Association had obtained agreement from the information and research unit of the West Yorkshire Probation Service to assist with the study. Clients who have worked with WYSC Association will be compared with a control group over a period of two years. Each WYSC Association client will be matched as closely as possible with a probationer who is not attending the scheme. They are matched by personal details, current order, details of most recent conviction and previous experience of conviction or custody. Overall there are 10 matching variables.

WYSC Association clients will be divided into those who have completed over 8 sessions of sports counselling and those who have completed between 1 and 7 sessions. Both of these groups will be compared against their control groups by their conviction record over two years.

Although the numbers are small the quantitative data produced by this comparative reconviction study will give the sort of objective evidence, which if it shows the appropriate results, will be likely to justify the continuation of this sort of work.

### Objective 2

If participation of WYSC does reduce the propensity to be reconvicted, or if it does not, we want to know why. The methods used to address this question include interviews with sports leaders, probation officers and sports clubs or leisure centres that may be used as exit routes for clients. Also contributing to this research objective are client questionnaires. These are completed by clients at the first sports counselling session, the end of the 12 week sports counselling and at a follow-up meeting with the sports leaders 12 weeks after the scheme. There is a fourth questionnaire to be completed by clients who terminate involvement with the scheme early. The questionnaires have been designed to examine the extent to which the WYSC objectives have been met. They also include a psychometric test for self esteem. This had been validated and used in an extensive previous study of the impact of unemployment on young people.

The Sports Solent Scheme identified increased self-esteem as a major benefit for participants and this test seeks to measure changes in this more precisely. In other respects the questionnaire design has also built on the findings of the Sports Solent project. The test for self-esteem will be incorporated into each of the questionnaires. This will enable us to identify if participation in the scheme has increased self-esteem, and if this self-esteem is maintained in the following 12 weeks.

**Objectives 3, 4 and 5**

The reaction of clients to WYSC will help WYSC improve their work. The research process will itself help clients to learn from Sports Counselling by reflecting on its impact on themselves. Follow-up meetings between sports leaders and clients 4 weeks and 12 weeks after Sports Counselling has been completed have been introduced by the research team as part of the research process, but these will also assist clients' learning. Interviews with sports leaders, probation officers and client questionnaires will contribute to achieving this research objective.

Several significant points are illustrated by this overview of the research.

1. The clarity of West Yorkshire Sports Counselling Association's Aims and Objectives made it relatively easy for the research team to decide what to measure and why.

2. Different research methods are appropriate for different objectives. Quantitative measures are being used to prove to an external organisation if it works or not. Qualitative measures are more valuable for showing why it works and improving the process of Sports Counselling.

3. Wherever possible a convergence of methods is used to complement each other in focusing on a research objective.

4. It has been important to gain the co-operation of key people or organisations who allow access to people or information needed in the research, in this case the probation service and the sports leaders.

5. Any research process is a compromise between what you would like to do and what you have the resources to do. For this reason in designing the research we spent some time working out how we could be most effective. One compromise we had to make was that we did not have time to interview individual clients, but instead we intend to construct some illustrative case studies from data already collected as part of the internal monitoring.

This paper has illustrated aspects of the evaluation of WYSC and some general principles but it should be remembered that each research problem is different and will require a unique approach. West Yorkshire Sports Counselling Association have recognised that evaluation of their effectiveness in meeting their objectives will be very important in their strategy for influencing policy concerning Sports Counselling within the Probation Service and obtaining future funding.

(1) Sports Council Research Unit (North West) 1990 *Solent Sports Counselling Project. Final Evaluation Report.* Sports Council North West. Manchester.

(2) Sports Council (1992) *National Demonstration Projects.* Sports Council. London.

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